



Published on *Covered in Cat Hair* (<https://coveredincathair.com>)

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The Feral50. Unimaginable Joy. Ch 2.

Wed, 2017-01-25 17:13 — Robin Olson

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It astonishes me how resilient cats like “Waterbury 1” can be, even with a mouth full of slowly dissolving teeth, infected gums and with burning sores on and under her tongue. Somehow through all of this, W1 has made impressive progress since I discovered her in a parking lot barely alive a week ago.

Her vet said she’d never seen anything so bad. W1’s teeth were either falling apart or were fused to her jaw from years of untreated stomatitis. If it was a human, the fragile gums would have been packed with gauze, but with the delicate bones of the feline jaw it wasn’t possible. The vet had to gently suction mucous and bloody pus out of the cat’s mouth before she could even intubate the cat and begin the difficult procedure. She had to remove the roots of teeth that were long gone and separate the teeth off the jaw bone. I don’t want to think about how much pain W1 must have been in and for how long.



©2017 Robin AF Olson. Sweet W1 before rescue, waits her turn to eat.

Every single one of W1’s teeth were removed. My guess is the root cause was bartonella gone unchecked for years, but it could also have been from other issues; we’ll never really know.

Her matted fur was completely shaved off. I asked if she got a bath, but they only needed to rinse her paws off because they were filthy.

I can’t help but imagine her wanting to use her front paws to wash her face before she gave up on trying. She had to have been rubbing dirt from her paws into her already infected mouth if she could manage to clean herself at all. I feel sick thinking about it.

Oddly enough she had no fleas, but does have ear mites for which she’s been treated. She’s on very heavy duty pain medication and is on an IV because she’s anemic and has an elevated white blood count.

With all her challenges, W1 still ate food barely a day after her procedure was completed. This remarkable girl wants to live. Though she shows no signs of being friendly, she has only been fearful with the staff, no hissing, no aggression so far.



©2017 Robin AF Olson. W1's sister with a few of the other colony cats.

We'd gotten W1 medical attention, but the "what do we do now" question returned. There was discussion that W1 would come to me. We'd reunite her with her nearly twin sister, who was just trapped yesterday. I've read that relocating ferals is more successful if they're paired. Thankfully, the sister is not sick AND to our surprise she was spayed a long time ago. We discovered she has a very badly done ear tip, so all she needed done was her vaccination updates. After vetting she was ready to be released back to the lot, but because we wanted her with her sister, we're holding her for a few days. Maybe she's friendly and we can work with her. We'll have to see how it goes.

Or maybe we won't...

Meanwhile...

...one of the Vet's clients had come to the clinic to drop her cat off to have a dental cleaning. She saw W1 in surgery, then heard W1's story, and was so moved she offered to adopt the cat if she needed a home.

Wait. Adopt a FERAL CAT? Would she live outside?

No.

W1 would live INSIDE her house, even if she was feral. The woman has a lot of experience with both feral cats and cats who have suffered the same dental issues as W1. W1 would want for nothing, ever. She would get the best care possible. It would be a far better situation than I could give W1, but what about her sister?

I try not to be jaded and maybe I'm afraid that telling you now will jinx it from really happening. That this amazing woman came forward at all turns W1's story into a fairytale of epic proportion. She added when we spoke this morning that she would consider adopting W1's sister, too.

What I'm learning and finding terribly difficult is this is an extremely fluid situation-more fluid than my brain can process. Day and night I get emails, texts, calls about what to do, who I should call, who told me what, trying to track what everyone is doing or needs and sorting out where each trapped cat was going to go (*though I am thankfully not in charge of that*). One minute I have a feral cat in my garage (*as I did last night*). The next minute I find myself signing up to take on two feral cats that may not be a good fit to even live as ferals! I'm asking my foster homes if they can take on a cat or two, or maybe even a pregnant feral if we come across another one. **Not to be a complete whiner, but I REALLY wanted to take a few months OFF from rescue and just REST. What have I gotten myself into?**

Between work, the #Feral50 craziness and finding my cat Petunia having focalized seizures last week I am fried. (and very sadly it looks like Petunia may have brain cancer-which I will

write more about later)



©2017 Robin AF Olson. *Petunia mid-seizure. We lost her mother, Gracie just over a year ago.*

There's a great divide in my head about what I expected and what I'm experiencing. I realized tonight that it's akin to dealing with a totally different kind of animal rescue. Getting a litter of kittens to foster takes some vetting and fussing and cleaning and de-worming and such, but with the ferals, it's all about logistics. **After trapping: where do they go? where do they get spayed/neutered? where do they spend a day to three days recovering? where do they go after that? Are they dumped-strays who are friendly and need a home? If so, is there a rescue to take them? If not, how can we get a rescue to take them or should they go back to the parking lot where we assumed all would go but may not be the case now. YIKES!**



©2017 Robin AF Olson. *A few of these guys have already been trapped.*

I'm surprised that of the first eight cats trapped we discovered a few of the cats were either already vetted and may be friendly and not feral at all. The people who have done a lot of trapping and working with ferals seem different, too. Maybe tougher in some ways and better at going with the flow. I can't quite put the words together yet because it's so new to me, but they seem okay with the constantly shifting tasks we need to accomplish times 50+.

And further surprises...

The gray cat with the strange fur was in my garage last night. I didn't try to touch him, thinking he needed peace and quiet after being trapped. **When he went into his foster home tonight he was head-butting his foster mom, soliciting pets!** He didn't even come out of his cat carrier the 24 hours he was here. I assumed he was scared and to leave him be, but he really wanted love.



©2017 Robin AF Olson. Gray kitty needed help, too, so he was high on our list to be trapped.

Some of the others are not feral either. I don't know how common this is that there are more friendlies than true ferals in a colony, but it's heartbreaking. All these cats getting dumped for whatever selfish, thoughtless, heartless reason. As a cat behavior counselor I know there are many reasons cats lose their homes that are fixable behavior issues, yet here these poor creatures are, fighting for their lives in difficult circumstances.

Last night we had an ice storm followed by pounding winds and rain. I kept thinking about the cats, imagining them hiding under the blue tarps near the warehouse, huddled for warmth. It makes me even more anxious to get all of them whatever help they need. I know they were all getting fed and that goes a long way to keep them alive. Some of the team have begun putting out shelters and I hope the cats will start using them soon.



©2017 Robin AF Olson. They got him and now I've got him!

Tomorrow there will be more trapping. Eight cats have been trapped and maybe eight more will get grabbed. I thought we were going to have a game plan and do a big trapping all at once, but the folks in charge are just going for what they can trap with the traps they have. I don't know what is the best way or if it matters how it's done. It's just amazing that it IS being done so fast when the donations are barely coming in the door for the spays/neuters. They're finding vouchers from other rescues or calling in favors. **They're just getting it done and I need to learn how to move as fast as they do, but I think I need more caffeine first.**



©2017 Robin AF Olson. Temporary lodging, gray kitty is hiding in his cat carrier. He ate 9 oz of food over night. Glad he has a full belly.

Waterbury1 is resting in her cage at the vet. She's clean and beginning her life anew. Her vet wants her to stay at the hospital for the full week so she can continue to monitor her recovery. We raised almost enough for the high end of the estimate. If a few more donations come in we'll be all set until we trap the other cats who are sick or injured.

This experience is all about how to face something difficult without having any idea beyond step number one about how you're going to get to step number two. It's about finding faith that you'll get there—that it will all shake out just fine. If you don't have enough faith, you're going to fantasize about sitting in a darkened room with a big box of chocolate chip cookies on hand and plenty of time to eat every single one. Don't ask me how I reached this hypothesis, but I just know it to be true.

As I've written in the past, a majority of the rescue process is about having faith that everything will be okay one day no matter how bumpy the path might be.

The tough part is believing it.

And lastly, W1's adopter liked my choice of a proper name for her instead of W1: *Hyacinth*, but then, after some discussion, she added that perhaps she should name the cat, *Robin*.

NOTE: If you'd like to make a donation towards W1's care, there's complete info on ways you can help on the [previous post](#) ^[1]. Stay tuned for even more news about the #Feral50.



©2017 Robin AF Olson. Such beautiful creatures.

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